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ABSTRACT

This technical assistance paper discusses the need for school-age child care and documents Florida's leadership activities in providing assistance to school districts seeking to meet the needs of school-age children who are unsupervised before and after school. The Florida projects described include: (1) the School-Age Child Care Incentive Program; (2) demonstration programs; (3) cooperative programs; (4) a Clearinghouse Center that offers technical assistance concerning school-age child care to school districts or other interested parties; and (5) a feasibility study focusing on statewide licensing of school-age child care programs offered by school districts and implementation of a school-age child care program on a statewide basis. (RH)

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PAPER

No. 1 (updated)	SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE: A RESPONSE TO NEED	Refer Questions to:
August, 1988		Patty Ball Thomas (904) 488-4888 SC 278-4888

Introduction

In 1986, the Florida Legislature created Section 228.0617, Florida Statutes, which established the School-Age Child Care Incentives Program. This technical assistance paper describes the need for school-age child care and documents Florida's leadership activities in providing assistance to school districts which are seeking to meet the needs of school-age children who are unsupervised before and after school.

The educational community is heavily involved in programs to assist children who are ill, abused, addicted, neglected or otherwise at risk. Emerging as a growing concern is the plight of school-age young children of working parents or a single parent. The escalation of women active in the work force has led to the latchkey child, the boy or girl who comes home to an empty house. It is not uncommon for children to be dropped off at school before dawn and then remain without supervision after school well into the twilight hours. In the following pages, the rationale and need for school-age child care will be documented and the leadership role of the Department of Education delineated.

School-Age Child Care: Historical Perspectives

Children of school-age have had supervision in years past from family members or by virtue of life on the farm or at a small business where supervision occurred as chores were performed. Children left school in large numbers at the end of elementary school for full-time employment. The shift in family structure reduced traditional supervision as families changed to parent and child or two working parents and child.

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A second force creating the need for after-school care came from the advent of child labor laws and the advancing age of compulsory school attendance. Children began increasingly to return to their homes after school rather than to a job or supervised chores. The increased involvement in church, civic, and community youth activities of more recent times came in response to children being at home with no supervision.

The Emerging Problem

Today, approximately half the women of America work outside the home. The incidence of single parent families is rising. These statistics take on a more disturbing meaning in view of the population projections for Florida into the 21st Century. Data for 1985 show that approximately one quarter

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(138,500) of all Florida elementary students return to empty homes. A 1984 study for the Governor's economic report projected a population increase for the State of 29.5 percent for the decade 1980-1990. The population climb will soar in the 1990's. Approximately 150,000 to 160,000 children are expected to be without adequate supervision during non-school hours and on holidays when parents work.

A corollary trend appears in the data which show a decline in numbers of children ages 10 to 18. For more affluent families who can afford after-school babysitting, either by a sibling or an outside teenager, the available pool of babysitters will shrink. In summary, several major problems will increase as the number of unsupervised latchkey children grows:

- An increase in accidents, the leading cause of death among school-age children in the elementary school;
- More widespread psychological problems stemming from loneliness and neglect;
- Higher delinquency and crime incidents in pace with the population increase;
- A rise in child neglect and abuse accompanying lack of supervision; and,
- Learning delays arising from unstructured time alone with little or no constructive study or snacking arrangements.

Other problems befall latchkey children but attention now needs to focus on the positive side.

Florida's Response

1. The School-Age Child Care Incentive Program

Florida's concern for young children, is well documented in its legislation. Notable are milestones such as permissive and then compulsory kindergarten, the mass of legislation in student services and exceptional education, the Primary Education Program (PREP), the Florida Progress in Middle Childhood Education program (PRIME), and pre-kindergarten education. The School-Age Child Care Incentive Program of 1986 (Section 228.0617, F.S.) was another major step. A growing awareness of the conditions described above prompted the Legislature to craft a program designed to be an early intervention strategy for the reduction of child abuse and neglect, emotional and psychological damage, and delinquency to which unsupervised children are particularly vulnerable.

The incentive grant concept is designed to stimulate districts to establish programs which are primarily fee based yet partially supported by the incentive grants. In this sense, the legislation was established to encourage the school-age child care program in the public schools on a larger scale. The legislative initiative followed an extensive study prepared for the House of Representatives K-12 Education Committee in January of 1985. The study revealed that for the 1984-85 school year, 19 school districts had some form of school-age child care in public elementary schools, with five more in the planning stage. A study conducted for the Department of Education in 1987 showed an increase to 34 in districts having school-age programs. Approximately 34,000 students participated in the reported programs. In addition, the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services funded from Title XX funds three school-age child care projects during 1986-87. These projects were located in Alachua, Brevard, and Suwannee counties. Districts funded cooperatively by HRS and the Department of Education in 1987-88 were Collier, Pinellas, and Brevard.

Programs funded under the School-Age Child Care Incentive Program (Section 228.0617, F.S.) all emanated from school districts and were either new creations, contracted services, or expansions of existing services. Salient requirements of the legislation include:

- Service to elementary school students;
- Involvement of school advisory committees;
- Provision for before-school care, after-school care, or both on regular school days and on school holidays when parents are working;
- Plans for staff training;
- Coordination with community agencies;
- Employment of high school and post-secondary students who are enrolled in work experience programs;
- Programs in areas of the state not served by school-age child care;
- Programs to serve low income students; and,
- Evaluation procedures to include teachers, parents, students, and administrators.

Funds for projects in 1986-87 were provided for up to 75 percent of the program costs (less other fund sources) and at a 50 percent level for projects continued in 1987-88. The legislation further stipulated that at least three proposals should be funded, one each from a small, medium and large school district to encourage diversity of models applicable to other school districts in the state. Four projects were funded in 1986-87:

Escambia	$ 72,709.00
Leon	45,810.00
Levy	43,251.00
St. Lucie	68,230.00

For 1987-88, programs in these school districts were funded:

Alachua	$ 35,354.00
Brevard	32,000.00
Collier	45,000.00
Escambia	29,290.00
Leon	71,775.00
Levy	25,125.00
Palm Beach	102,387.00
Pinellas	45,000.00
St. Lucie	24,971.00
Suwannee	38,485.00
Volusia	97,613.00

2. Demonstration Programs

Section 228.0617(14), F.S., defines the role of school-age child care to emphasize educational and recreational programs. The 1987 Legislature gave reinforcement by an addition to Section 228.0617, F.S., requiring the Department of Education to establish two demonstration sites to showcase partnership programs between school districts and local parks and recreation departments which provide after-school programs for pre-teenagers. The allocation was $200,000.

The demonstration concept is a technique to stimulate interest, model new procedures, or serve as a training site. Products from the selected demonstration sites may be methods of governance, procedures manuals, curriculum frameworks, ideas for transportation and snacks, and examples of the involvement of interagency and advisory councils. Demonstration sites have proven their worth in the National Diffusion Network program where they act as outreach programs, training centers, and showcases. The Department of Education and the Florida Recreation and Parks Association have developed the specifics for implementing this new part of the statute. Awards for the 1988-89 school year have been made to Volusia and Palm Beach school districts.

3. Cooperative Programs

As stated earlier, the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services funded three school-age child care programs using funds from the Federal Dependent Care Program - Alachua, Brevard, and Suwannee. The purpose of the Dependent Care Program is to establish sites in low income areas which cannot be supported by fees alone. Under a cooperative agreement with the Department of Education, three districts were funded for 1987-88 - Collier, Pinellas, and Brevard. The Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services exercises financial control over the project, while the Department of Education handles grantee selection and awards. Both Departments have the responsibility of monitoring these programs. This cooperative agreement will continue as additional monies are provided for the 1988-89 fiscal year.

4. The Clearinghouse Center

The School-Age Child Care Incentive Program also established a statewide clearinghouse to create, process, collect, and disseminate information about school-age child care programs. The center is designed to offer technical assistance to school districts or other interested parties. Another facet of the clearinghouse concept is to conduct studies to assist the Department of Education in addressing needs for school-age child care. For example, the Clearinghouse will establish a network to share research and practices with school districts, the Department of Education, and the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services on successful program strategies and components. Guidance for the Clearinghouse project, which was granted to Latchkey, Inc., of Largo, Florida, is provided by a seven-member advisory council consisting of two local representatives of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, two providers of school-age child care, and one parent. The council meets to hear reports and provide reaction to Clearinghouse activities.

Two major projects of the Clearinghouse have been sponsorship of a yearly school-age child care symposium and the establishment of a demonstration site in Pinellas County for a model child-care program will be located at Kings Highway and Sandy Lane Elementary Schools for 1988-89. The demonstration site has procedures established for visitations and offers on-site training.

5. Feasibility Study

From the 1986-87 appropriation for the School-Age Child Care Incentive Program, a grant was awarded to the Alachua County School District to prepare a state-of-the-art report on: 1) the desirability and costs of statewide licensing of school-age child care programs operated by school districts and 2) for implementing a school-age child care program on a statewide basis. Public schools programs are exempt from Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services licensure unless funds from Title XX are used. However, public school programs must meet the local health and safety requirements applicable to public school buildings and grounds. A copy of the study has been sent to each district school superintendent. Major recommendations are as follows:

- Continuation of the School-Age Child Care Incentive Program;

- Continuation of and support for several methods presently used by school districts to fund the programs (primarily sliding fees);
- Establishment of a task force to develop exemplary standards appropriate for school-age children; and
- Technical assistance to districts in implementing school-age child care programs.

Conclusions

There is need to provide a supervised, structured program before and after school for the more than 138,000 children in Florida who remain alone or wandering in their neighborhoods until their working parents return home. Families at the poverty level cannot afford after-school care. Middle class families often erroneously assume leaving a child alone builds self-reliance. Clearly, children left to their own devices are subject to delinquency, danger, emotional and psychological traumas, lack of proper nutrition, and limited intellectual stimulation. Resulting dangers are physical, mental, and psychological--all factors which enhance "at risk" conditions.

Florida has moved forward in the last three years with the creation of pilot programs funded by the Florida legislature. A feasibility study to identify the requirements for licensing school-age child care programs and conducting a statewide school-age child care program has been made. New relationships with parks and recreation departments have been established. Interagency cooperation is high. The school-age child care movement is a significant step in providing a program of excellence for Florida's children and youth.

Resources and References

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